

# Anderson speaks out on shattercane, Johnson grass control



Bob Anderson, Adult Farmer Instructor in New Holland, teaches the difference between shattercane and Johnson grass, and how to control the problem weeds.

NEW HOLLAND — Ten years ago, a Lancaster County farmer planted what he thought was sorghum with his corn which he planned to harvest for silage. He inadvertently let the crop go to seed.

Within two years, his farm was so infested with shattercane that he couldn't walk through the fields. The annual grass — which is the spitting image of Johnson grass above ground — soon spread to 50 percent of the area farms. It remains a severe problem today making entire corn fields unharvestable in some cases.

But, help is on the way. If Bob Anderson has anything to say about it, the problem weed will soon be under control. The Adult Farmer Instructor for the Eastern Lancaster County School District, New Holland, has been running experimental test plots on shattercane control with local farmers for three years now.

Part of the problem in teaching farmers to control the pest, says Anderson, is the plant's uncanny resemblance to Johnson grass. The only way to be really sure which is

which, he adds, is to dig them up. Where Johnson grass has tuber-like rhizomes underground, shattercane has none.

Though, Johnson grass rhizomes allow that weed to propagate vegetatively, giving it an extra reproductive advantage over shattercane, the shattercane seed can remain dormant for an extraordinarily long period of time. Neither of the weeds are any fun to try to eradicate, but it's best to properly identify the problem first and then proceed with an appropriate control program, according to Anderson.

"Our biggest problem in effecting a control program has been that farmers have mistaken shattercane for Johnson grass and have tried to control rhizomes where rhizomes didn't exist," states Anderson, who works out of the Eastern Lancaster County School District's Agricultural Department.

"In order to determine the best control program, we took the three farms with the worst shattercane infestations and tested various

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